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Obituaries

L. Ron Hubbard, founded Scientology

By Jacqueline Adams
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L. Ron Hubbard, 74, a science fiction writer and the reclusive founder of the Church of Scientology, died Friday at his ranch near San Luis Obispo, Calif., after a stroke.

The Rev. Heber C. Jentzch, president of the Church of Scientology International, said that Mr. Hubbard's body had become "an impediment to his research into the spirit of man" and that he had discarded his body.

He announced to his friends a week ago that he was leaving his body. He knew the time was coming," said Mr. Jentzch, who assumed the presidency of the church after Mr. Hubbard resigned in 1981. "We will continue to work for the goals that L. Ron Hubbard set forth more than ever."

Mr. Hubbard founded the first Church of Scientology in Washington in 1952 and changed the way millions of people thought of religion through his novel and controversial theories on the mind.

The Church of Scientology grew to be one of the richest and most prominent of the new religions by the 1970s. But after Mr. Hubbard disappeared from public life and transferred control of the church to a group called the Sea Orgs in 1982, the church was beset by bitter internal power struggles and court battles.

Mr. Hubbard had not been seen in

public for several years despite several attempts to force him to appear in court in a series of lawsuits filed by disgruntled former Scientologists, who claimed he led a cult that brainwashed its members.

Reports that Mr. Hubbard had been dead for several years soon arose. His eldest son, Ronald E. DeWolf, who changed his last name after a row with his father, in a lawsuit filed in 1982 claimed that Mr. Hubbard was either dead or mentally incompetent, but a judge ruled the author was alive.

Until his book "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health" was published in 1948 Mr. Hubbard was known primarily as a science fiction writer.

The book made American best-seller lists, and Dianetics became a national fad.

Where other religions might promise salvation in the afterlife, Scientology, based on Mr. Hubbard's seminal work, offered an immediate solution to life's problems. With the help of a trained Scientologist, the church claimed people could clear themselves of emotional blocks called "engrams" and reach full physical and mental potential.

A federal judge in 1971 ruled Scientology was a religion entitled to protection under the First Amendment, but the organization's legal entanglements continued.

In 1979, Mr. Hubbard's wife, Mary Sue, and 10 other Scientologists were convicted of burglarizing and

bugging government agencies, which group leaders claimed had harassed the church for decades.

In 1984, the U.S. Tax Court upheld the removal of tax-exempt status from the Church of Scientology of California saying that branch of the church "does not qualify for exemption from taxation ... because it is operated for a substantial commercial purpose and because its net earnings benefit L. Ron Hubbard, his family" and a private trust controlled by key church members.

The court ordered the California church to pay \$1.4 million in back taxes for the years 1970 through 1972.

Last summer, a jury in Portland, Ore., awarded \$39 million to a former member of the group who alleged she had been defrauded by its claims that it could improve her intelligence, eyesight and creativity.

Another judge later dismissed the award and ordered a new trial.

The Church of Scientology also has filed and won a number of lawsuits challenging the FBI, Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and Internal Revenue Service.

Mr. Hubbard was born in Tilden, Neb. He attended George Washington University in 1934 and Princeton University during the 1940s.

During World War II, Mr. Hubbard served in the U.S. Navy as commander of a submarine chaser.

Before founding the Church of Scientology, he was a disc jockey for WOL radio in Washington.